the season an adult female spent several days with him and appeared to respond favourably to his ardent courtship, but even she did not remain. His failure on each occasion was not due to lack of virility in proclaiming territory, for throughout 1950 he was as assiduous as the other resident whistlers in territorial song. That he is the only unmated male in "Fairlea" timbers may be due to the lack of a good sheltered nesting site in his territory. While now, in December, the annual courtship by his whistler neighbours of their faithful partners has culminated in nesting and rearing of young, Male 4 is still whistling the monotonous "lonely" song.

A VISIT TO THE MONTE BELLO ISLANDS

By KEITH SHEARD, Nedlands.

During a survey carried out in north-west waters in August 1950 by the C.S.I.R.O., Division of Fisheries, using the crayfish processing vessel *Villaret*, the islands of the Monte Bello group were visited for a short period. The demands of the survey allowed only a limited time to be spent on the islands but the following brief notes are presented for those who are interested in the natural history of the north-west.

The group of islands covers an area of about 75 square miles, and are about 40 miles north-west of the mouth of the Fortescue River, the nearest point on the coast, and about 85 miles north-north-east of Onslow. They lie within an area of low and irregular rainfall (about 8 in.) with long periods of drought. Most of the rain falls in heavy showers during the summer "willi willis" when evaporation is very high. The vegetation is very similar to that of the adjacent mainland and is chiefly a spinifex complex with *Myoporum, Cassia, Olearia* and *Chenopodium*. Trailing *Ipomea* is common and forms a tangle of stems underfoot. Buffel grass, which is spreading rapidly on the mainland and even crowding out the Spinifex *(Triodia)* in favourable localities, is also well established at all the islands of the group.

The chief islands are Hermite, about 6 miles long and two miles wide, fairly rocky with limestones and a coarse sandstone, and heavily indented with shallow lagoon-like bays which dry out at low tides; and Trimouille Island composed chiefly of sand dunes and limestone ridges. This island is about 3 miles long and barely a mile wide. In addition, small islands, each of a few acres in extent, are very numerous.

Water supplies are a problem. There is a small cement catchment at the side of a small hill inside the entrance of the southernmost lagoon of Hermite Island. This would be serviceable after rain. Two wells have been dug to about 15 feet through sandstone several hundred yards south-westerly of these. They were partly filled with blown sand by the time we visited them. Fairly good water is reported to be present at high tide in these wells. Good water is also reported at a depth of 10 to 20 feet at the base of the largest sandhill at the northerly end of Trimouille Island.

All of the islands bear evidenee of the severity of the drought conditions and of the violenee of the summer storms. The tidal range is from 10 to 14 feet and the effeets of the wind-driven waves are apparent in all the low-lying areas.

In general, animal life on the land was searee as eould be expeeted from the severe eonditions. The eommon rat *(Rattus rattus)* appeared to be plentiful (as was the ease in most of the larger islands of the north-west) and the domestie eat is still present on Hermite Island. There was no traee of the Wallaby *(Lagorchestes conspicillatus)* or the Bandieoot *(Isoodon barrowensis)* on either island. Both sea and land birds were searee. However time was laeking in whieh to make observations with the patienee required when earrying out a proper survey of the shy and ineonspieuous land birds.

Two speeies of exeeptional interest which were noted were the Blaek-and-white Wren *(Malurus leucopterus)* and the Spinifexbird *(Eremiornis carteri)*. These were present on Trimouille Island. *Malurus leucopterus* was noted at Sholl Island also. This speeies of *Malurus* has been reeorded previously only from Barrow Island and from Dirk Hartog Island. The distinetive males were seen.

To eonelude this summary several extraets have been taken from the daily journal of the survey. They are presented in a condensed form in order to give a running impression of the marine seene.

"Surveyed 'lagoons' and north end of Hermite Island. Heavy tide rips between the small islands, all eliffs heavily undereut, with large roek oysters *(Saxostroca cucullata)* very abundant between tide-marks. Milky water and eoral mud between Hermite and Trimouille Islands resembling the barren Stanley and Airey Pools near Maud Landing on North-West Cape Peninsula. Large schools of fish (ehiefly mullet) in the 'lagoons' and juvenile fishes very numerous in the shallows."

"Small eoral reefs present westerly and northerly of Hermite Island. Reef fish numerous. Two dugongs seen while returning to *Villaret*. Many small flights of dotterels, ete., ineluding the Redeapped Dotterel, White-bellied Sea-eagles and Ospreys were nesting. The Sooty Oyster-eateher was numerous in pairs. Two Mutton-birds *(Puffinus pacificus)* flew aboard at night. None were seen during the day, although several Caspian Terns were present.

"Green and Hawksbill Turtles very numerous in the shallows, ehiefly on the eastern, sandy beaehes of Trimouille Island. Mating was in progress. The males were half to two-thirds the size of the females."

"Two pelieans present in the shallows at the north end of Hermite Island." (A rookery was found about 40 miles southward at Little Roeky Islet, about 2 miles eastward of North Island of the Mangrove Islands. At this rookery 37 nests were oeeupied, eggs and young birds being present. This is a nesting loeality additional to those listed by Serventy and Whittell in their *Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia*, 1948, p. 122).